

**In the Specification**

Replace the paragraph beginning at Line 19 of page 18 and ending at line 5 of page 19 with the following amended paragraph:

Referring to Fig. 27, the exposed portions of nitride layer 16 are exposed to ~~addition~~ additional etching conditions, such as, for example, a phosphoric acid etch as described above with reference to Fig. 18, to reduce a thickness of the exposed portions of the nitride layer. Specifically, the original nitride layer had a thickness of "A" (which remains the thickness of an unetched central region of the nitride layer), and the etched portion of the nitride layer (the edge regions) has a thickness of "B". Preferably, "B" is about one-half "A". The etching does not move the furthest lateral periphery of nitride layer 16 (defined by sidewall 17) outward from openings 70.